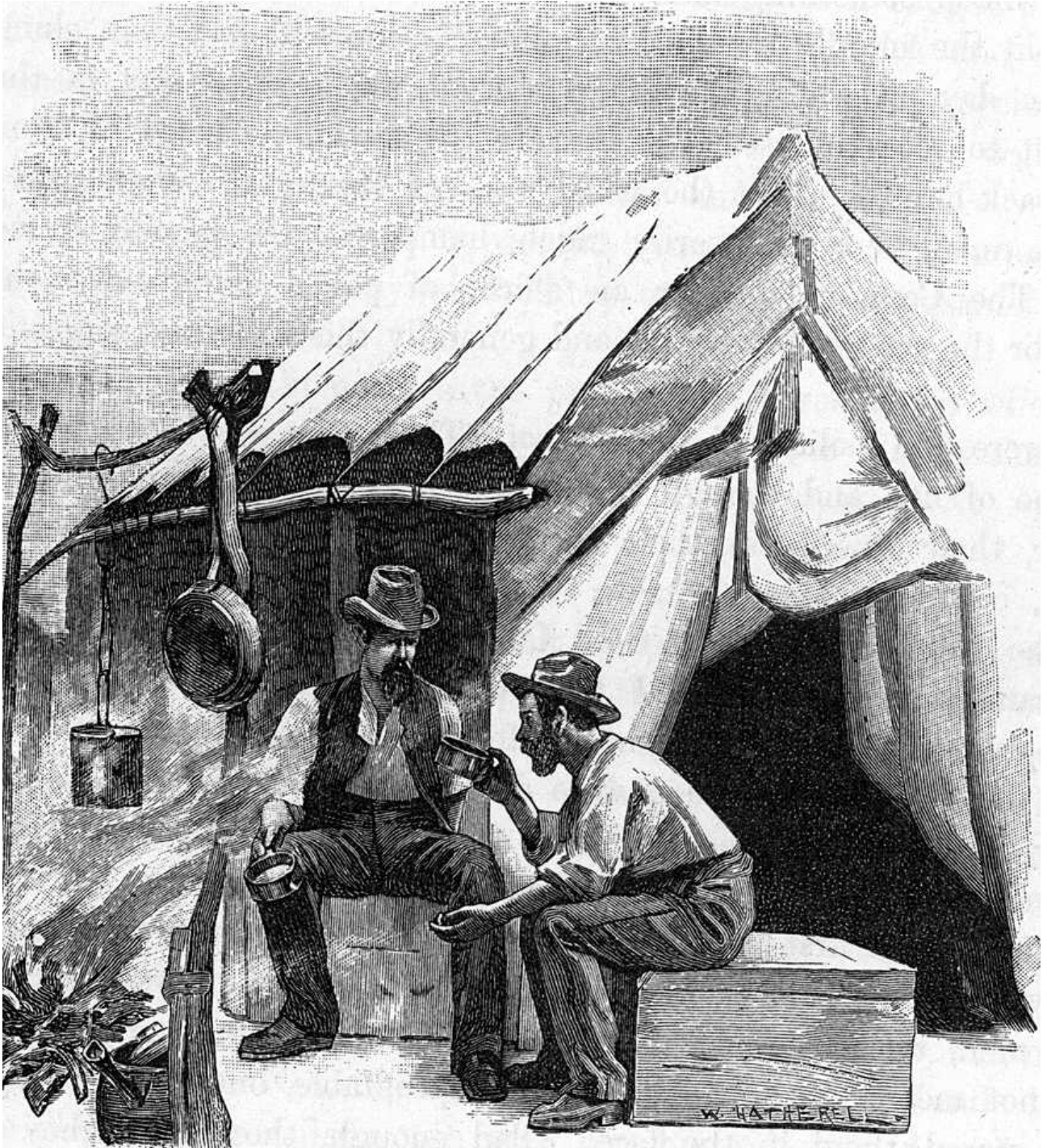


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THE FOLKLORE OF



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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The Folklore of
Western Australia

Edited by
Marc Glasby

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Introduction

Western Australia has a rich and varied folklore but if you have read any books on Australian folklore you would barely be aware of it.

Most books written about Australia and Australian history tend to focus on the eastern states and W.A. is invariably forgotten. We are one third of the Australian land mass but in the eyes of 'tothersiders' Australia ends on the eastern side of the W.A. border.

While I read through uncountable numbers of history books looking for information for wanowandthen.com, I quite often find little snippets of information that are funny or interesting but don't quite fit into the usual historical narrative. Few people will ever find them as they are buried deep in thick volumes that hardly anyone reads.

I always felt that it was a shame that nobody would ever hear these stories and that is where I got the idea for this book.

This is an attempt to set the record straight and to put down as much of our folklore as I can collect.

I operate a Facebook page at : <https://www.facebook.com/WestAustralianFolklore> where you can add to the growing collection and I will then include the story in this book for everyone to share.

Our folklore is a combination of true stories, funny stories and outright leg-pulling. It can include prose and poetic verse but as long as it is about Western Australia then it will find a home here.

Please contribute by adding to the stories we already have and let the eastern states know that W.A. has a folklore history too!

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Golden road!

Some years ago (quite a few in fact) road works were being conducted in Guildford after the railway line had been constructed and quartz was being used as the road base.

After some heavy rain the lumps of quartz started to come through the road surface and one day when a cart wheel struck and dislodged a piece of quartz, a sharp eyed youngster spotted the glint of gold.

He decided to try and find the origin of the quartz and after an extensive search discovered that it was supposed to have come from a quarry near Greenmount.

Even after careful examination over the years, no seam of gold has ever been found at the quarry and the origin of the gold laden quartz remains a mystery.

Adams & Flinders

In the 1920s a Dr. Adams and Charles Flinders were the town Justices of The Peace at Wyndham. For some reason they hated each other and one afternoon after drinking at the local hotel they had an all out brawl in the main street.

The constable had no choice but to arrest them and they spent the night in the lock-up. Next morning it was decided (as there were no other JPs in town) that they would each preside over the other and impose a nominal fine on each other.

Adams was the first to preside, fining Flinders five shillings. Adams then replaced Flinders in the dock, but Flinders imposed a fine of ten pounds stating; "There's far too much of this sort of thing, this is the second case of this kind this morning." Their relationship went from bad to worse.



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This story inspired me to write the following bush ballad :

Adams and Flinders

Up in old Port Wyndham
back in the early days
a tale is told about two men
who wouldn't mend their ways

Adams hated Flinders
they were the town's JPs
They'd love to lock each other up
then throw away the keys

One hot and dusty afternoon
while drinking in the pub
insults turned to punches
over some imagined snub

Out into the street they went
with flailing legs and arms
The cops came down and locked them up
before they came to harm

Then in the morning sobered up
there was one fact to face
Each would sit in judgement
upon the other's case

Well Adams was the first to sit
upon the other's crime
The gavel fell, the judgement was
a mere five shilling fine

Then Flinders turn to sit arrived
He donned his wig and frowned
'There's too much of this thing about
the fine will be ten pounds'

We don't know how it went from there
or how the story ends
but one thing we can bet for sure
they'd never be good friends

(c) 2000

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Twice lucky.

Paddy Hannan (famous for one of the major gold discoveries in Western Australia) may have been just a footnote in history if he didn't have just a little luck on his side.

At the same time Paddy had set off to register a claim on the land he and his mates had found gold on, another man was travelling in the same area and was getting very short of food.

After setting up camp he took out his rifle to go hunting and after some searching he levelled his sights on what he took to be an emu coming through the scrub.

To give himself a better chance of bagging the bird he let it come closer and it was only at the last minute he realised that the 'emu' was in fact a man, a man that turned out to be Paddy Hannan!



Paddy Hannan

Plane crash & glider club.

In November 1919 Norman Hicks brought a small aeroplane to Pingelly and offered joy flights over the area for a fee. Local children were given the day off from school and unable to contain their excitement surged onto the landing area as the plane was coming in with some paying passengers aboard.

Norman brought the nose of the plane up to avoid the children but failed to clear overhead lines resulting in a sudden end to the joy flights. Luckily no one was injured but the plane was badly damaged.

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The accident didn't seem to put the locals off the thought of flying as a glider club was formed some 10 years later. The glider was locally constructed and was launched by means of an elastic rope. When the rope finally wore out the glider was towed aloft with a motor car. Eventually the glider crashed and was too badly damaged to be repaired and its remains were said to be stored away somewhere in someone's shed.

Marry me! Or Else!

An English immigrant was working as a farm hand for a local farmer and eventually asked the farmer for permission to marry his daughter. The proposal was rejected and the farm hand then menaced the farmer's daughter with a gun. She managed to talk him out of doing anything silly but he returned later with a stolen rifle and began firing into the farm house. The farmer's daughter returned fire while the farmer went to Southern Cross for help.

Eventually the farm hand gave up and stole a car at gunpoint. On his way back from Southern Cross with a 'posse' the farmer spotted the farm hand driving the stolen vehicle and opened fire killing him instantly.

Hoodwinked!

1. At one time foot races were popular in Sandstone and punters made bets on the outcome with prize money being awarded to the winner.

One day a stranger arrived in town and got wind of the races. He wanted to join in but was seen to be quite a poor runner. The locals, who were fond of a practical joke persuaded him to wear a pair of blinkers (like those worn by horses) to keep him pointed in the right direction. The local runners were persuaded to let him win a couple of practise sessions while wearing the blinkers in the hope that they could get him to wear them during the real race meeting. After 'winning' the practise rounds the new chum duly entered the races and the locals gathered in great numbers to see the show.

On race day fantastic odds were offered for the 'blinkered' runner but none of the locals were keen on laying a bet. An old bushy put on a pound (a large sum for the day) and when the competitors walked out, sure enough, the new chum had his blinkers on.

The crowd applauded and cheered to see such a sight but when it was time for the race to start off came the blinkers and the new chum said 'Now I will show you how to run'. He won every race that day and along with his 'bushy' friend cleaned out the bookmakers before departing quickly on the next stage out of town.

2. Some time later a couple of odd characters arrived in town. One small and spindly wearing a suit some sizes too big, another tall man wearing a suit some sizes too small.

The large man was very fond of a drink but became aggressive and picked fights with the locals every time he got drunk. Trouble was he lost every fight getting a complete thrashing into the bargain. It was said that even a 60 year old gave him a hiding on one occasion.

Each time he sobered up he was very apologetic and meek. Without the booze inside him he was a

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complete gentleman but each time he got drunk he would pick another fight and take another beating.

This went on for some days before he singled out the largest of the locals and tried to goad him into yet another brawl. The local man would have none of it until the stranger wagered five pounds that he could take him. The fight took place with the usual results and the next day the stranger went round to apologise asking for the return of his money as he had been drunk and was not responsible for his actions the night before.

Surprisingly the local man agreed but warned him that should it happen again he would not return any money.

Of course as soon as he was 'in his cups' the stranger sought out the local again and challenged him to yet another fight. This time he was waving a fist full of notes and so it was agreed to arrange a fight for the next day.

The locals gathered and bets were placed on the outcome. The small stranger, who had kept a low profile, placed a number of bets on his large companion and soon it was time for the fight to begin.

It was all over almost as soon as it started but this time it was the big stranger who was the victor. After collecting his winnings he sought out each man who had given him a hiding and returned the favour two fold – all except the 60 year old who he congratulated on his 'pluck'.

The two left town with bulging wallets and some time later it was found that the big man was a professional boxer from the east and his small mate was his trainer.

Spirit of the goldfields.

A woman and her 3 children arrived in Sandstone on an old rickety cart being pulled by a worn out old horse. There was a wrapped bundle in the back of the cart that turned out to be the woman's dead husband.

The family had fallen on hard times and the husband had been so ill he could not work. The woman found what work she could but there was never enough money. They had decided to head for the coast hoping that with better conditions the man's health would improve.

As they made their way west they were helped by other travellers who gave them what food and water they had to spare but the man died before the family reached the coast and now the woman and her three children were destitute.

Arrangements were made in Sandstone for the man's burial and the 'hat' was passed around, as it usually was on such occasions, to raise money to pay for the burial. There was a small amount left over which was given to the woman.

As the family was now to be sent to the coast they had no further need for the old horse and cart so an auction was held. It was sold for 12 pounds, but then its new owner decided he had no use for it and it was put up for sale again. The next 'owner' paid 10 pounds but he too decided the rig was not for him and again the horse and cart were put up for sale. This happened until over 100 pounds had

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been paid and the rig was eventually given to an old prospector who thought he could use the horse but not the old cart.

In the true spirit of the goldfields, all the money from these various 'sales' was handed over to the widow and her children.

Nuclear explosion, earthquake or meteor?

180km north east of Leonora is Banjawarn Station, a 1 million acre property on the edge of the desert.

On May 28th 1993 a seismic event was recorded in this area that coincided with reports of a fireball in the sky. The disturbance was 170 times larger than any man made explosion recorded in Australia.

It transpired that the station had been purchased in 1993 by the doomsday cult, Aum Shinrikyo; infamous for the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. Later investigation found that sheep on the property had been exposed to sarin gas and that traces still remained in the soil. There seems little doubt that the station had been used to experiment and prepare for the attack on Tokyo.

There was speculation that the fireball and seismic disturbance may have been the first atomic explosion carried out by non-government forces, in this case by an extreme terrorist group. Aum Shinrikyo were known to have recruited two Russian nuclear scientists and had been involved with mining uranium (there is a deposit on the station) so it is not too far a stretch to imagine that they may have attempted to set off a nuclear explosion.

Other explanations for this event have included a meteor bursting apart in the atmosphere (as there is no evidence of a ground strike) or an earthquake of around 3.6 magnitude.

Any investigation into the event was not carried out until years after it had happened so no definitive answer has ever been found.

Read more about the Aum presence in W.A. At
http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/part06.htm

Sophisticated Tom

Tom Doyle was a publican in Kanowna and although quite rich was somewhat unsophisticated. When he took his new bride on honeymoon to Melbourne he was asked by the Manager if he required the bridal chamber. Tom replied that his new wife may require the chamber but he was happy to 'piss out the window'.

Back home in Kanowna a dignitary was making a speech when Tom encountered olives in vinegar for the first time. In the middle of the speech Tom jumped up and shouted out that 'someone has pissed in the gooseberries.'

Suspicious drowning.

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In October 1933 a Greek man was drowned in Lake Dumbleyung in what some locals suspected to be foul play.

Peter Kosta vanished and besides his neatly folded clothes by the lake and a set of footprints leading to the waters edge, no other sign of him could be found.

Locals had a number of theories about the disappearance but it was not until 1944 that Harry Wann, walking along the dry lake bed, came across human remains. Although it could never be confirmed, it was presumed that the bones belonged to Peter Kosta.

Horse whipped!

Road board elections for the Wellington district in 1873 were the catalyst for an ongoing feud to boil over.

Dr. Lovegrove and Mr. Carey were standing against one another and at one point they clashed in the street.

Lovegrove attacked Carey with a horse whip and as a result people voted Carey on to the board.

Lovegrove was charged and brought before a Perth magistrate who gave him a mere hour in gaol and a 25 pound fine.

Eye Eye Sir!

A local character in the Capel area was one Denny Connell who was thought to be a bit eccentric.

On one occasion he was blowing out stumps with gelignite and lost an eye. Without mentioning it to anyone he walked to Bunbury for medical care.

Later after visiting a doctor and being told to take a dose of medicine in water, he waded into the Capel River to take each dose.

On yet another occasion he was travelling to Perth by train and lost his much loved hat out the window. Unperturbed he marked a cross in the dust on the glass proclaiming that he would now know where to find it on the return journey.

Poisoned flour

John Death (an appropriate name as it turns out) worked for Joshua Edwards and had a small shack where he kept his belongings.

On a number of occasions his hut was raided by Aborigines while he was away and flour, tea, tobacco and the like were taken.

Death placed a sign in front of his hut stating 'NOTICE. POISON FLOUR MEAL' and he even informed the local policeman that he had the strychnine laced flour to get rid of wild dogs.

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Of course the inevitable happened and the Aborigines - who could not read the sign - stole the flour and a young child died as a result.

Death was charged over the matter but no records can be found to shed light on the outcome of the case.

Death drowned in Gingin Brook in 1872.

Dying to be together.

In 1942 Mrs. Lindsay suddenly passed away from a heart attack. Her husband, working in Bindoon died the same day of the same cause.

The two hearses, bringing the departed to Pingelly to be identified, arrived outside the police station at exactly the same time.

Sawn off shop.

When Mr. Spragg built the first store in Popanyinning (1904) he sited it in an area he thought may be flood prone so it was built on stilts.

When the railway came through the surveyors informed him that he had to move the shop which he did, relocating some short distance west.

As there had been no floods he built the new shop with firm footings with the idea that it would be there permanently. The surveyors, however, had other ideas.

Some time later when the main road was being put through the surveyors again informed Mr. Spragg that his shop was 3 feet too far forward.

Fed up with having to continually shift the store, Mr. Spragg simply got a saw and cut off the front 3 feet of the building.

The ship comes Inn

A cyclone in 1866 drove the ship *New Perseverance* high up on to the land near Cossack.

An enterprising local (Augustus Seubert) decided not to let the hull go to waste and cut holes in the side and opened The Ship's Inn, the first pub in town.

A tale of two apples.

The Granny Smith apple (like so many other new varieties of fruit) seems to have been a happy accident with Maria Ann Sherwood-Smith developing the first apples from an apple core that was thrown away and the seeds then germinating - or so the story goes.

The new variety of apples were first popular in N.S.W. and their arrival in Donnybrook also seems to have come about by chance. A Mr. Chapman was dealing with a nursery in N.S.W. and as part of

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a consignment he was sent a couple of the new apples trees to try out.

The trees did well in Donnybrook and the green apples they produced were good for both cooking and eating. The apples were first known locally as Champan's Late. Cuttings were taken and grafted to other apple trees, the Parke brothers brought in a further 175 trees from N.S.W. and soon the Granny Smith apple came to dominate apple production in the area.

The apple that was really developed in the Donnybrook area is the less well known Lady Williams. This is a red apple that again seems to have come about by accident when a seed germinated and came up near a water tank. The tree was almost killed twice - even being pulled out of the ground on one occasion. The Williams family persisted with the tree and gradually developed a new type of apple from the original sapling.

Secret Chinese 'herbs and spices'.

The Chinese cook at Bidgemia (Ah Lee) was constantly teased and tormented by the other station hands. They played practical jokes on him all the time and generally made his life miserable.

Eventually Ah Lee had enough of the teasing and threatened to put poison in the stew. The teasing continued unabated and all of a sudden there were a lot of sick station hands.

On another station (Mingenoo) another Chinese cook (Ah Sam) told his workmates he was going to use poison and go to heaven. No one believed him either and Ah Sam died in 1893 by his own hand aged just 31. He is buried on the station.

Down the well.

In 1978, three year old Julie Styles fell through the rotten wooden cover of a well on the family property. She was being looked after for the day by her aunt, 62 year old Mona Styles.

Mona jumped down the well after the child but was then trapped 28 feet down. Julie's sister, Robyn (5 years old) was the only other person around and Mona asked her to phone for help. She was unable to work out how to use the phone and Mona was left clinging to a pipe in the well while trying to support Julie.

After an hour in the cold water Mona's hands were going numb but luckily Julie's parents arrived home in time and a rescue was effected with a length of rope. Very soon afterward, Robyn was taught how to use a phone...

Dodgy damper.

On one occasion while Dom Savado was exploring the area around New Nocia, he had a couple of Aborigines with him as assistants. The small party had run out of water but had a plentiful supply of flour, sugar and tea. Before pitching camp for the day Dom Savado instructed the two men to go in one direction while he went in another to look for water. Dom Savado searched for some time without success and returned to camp to find his two assistants had started a camp-fire and were cooking damper.

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When the damper was cooked and the three men had all eaten, Dom Savado asked if there was any tea. The men replied that they had not found water, so Dom Savado asked how they had managed to make the damper.

One of the men simply scooped some flour into his mouth and began to mix it with his spittle. Ejecting the mass of flour into his had he said, 'That way make 'em damper.'

Icy cold.

The train transported gold from Meekatharra and the security guards were always locked in to the hot stuffy rail car. One day they had a bottle of whiskey with them and asked the train guard for some ice. He returned soon afterward with a nice cool lump. It melted quickly as they consumed the alcohol so they asked for more. This went on until the bottle was almost empty and when they asked again the guard replied: "Sorry lads, I can't give you any more, the body is beginning to show."

Teacher gets a lesson.

Conversation over the School of the Air radio between a teacher and a student:

Teacher: 'A drover was droving 14 cattle down the Canning Stock Route for one week. During that time 6 calves were born. How many cattle were there at the end?'

Student: 'Nineteen, miss'

Teacher: 'No think again'

Student: <pause> 'Nineteen, miss...'

Teacher: 'No, 14 cows plus 6 calves make 20.'

Student: 'Yes miss but when droving the allowance for the drover's tucker is one cow a week and they had been on the track for a week miss...'

Bubbly bath.

It was said there was a barmaid on the Murchison gold fields who was offered 25 gold sovereigns to strip naked and take a bath in a tub of champagne. She took up the challenge and two dozen bottles of fine Champagne were emptied in to a tub where she took her bath in full view of the gaping miners.

When she had finished it was decided to put the Champagne back into bottles as it is well known that fine Champagne does not go flat quickly and after all who wanted to waste so much good booze.

The only problem was that when the wine was put back in to the 24 bottles there was still enough left over to fill an extra bottle.

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(We seriously doubt the authenticity of this tale although we did find a second well told version in the book 'Great Southern Memories' by J.A. Genoni.)

Blood donor gives a little bit more

There is a story about a young teenage girl having an accident with a cool drink bottle and cutting herself badly. She was in need of a blood transfusion and a local donor was found and brought in to supply the blood.

As the girl was receiving the transfusion and being stitched up she started to giggle and behave in a most unusual way for someone who had just been injured.

The transfusion over, the donor returned from whence he had come - the local pub - and the girl was not only left to get over the injuries she had sustained, she had to get over her first hangover as well.

Murder most foul.

Victor McCaskell, his wife and baby had a farm about 14 miles from Bruce Rock back in 1930. Helping on the farm was a young worker called Billy Halbert.

McCaskell complained to his neighbours about Billy's behaviour and had apparently talked about firing him only to be threatened by Halbert afterwards.

On December 30th 1930 Jack Rae (a neighbour) saw Victor running through the paddock towards him carrying a small bundle. As he got closer Rae was horrified to see that it was Victor's baby covered in blood.

McCaskell said that he had finally had enough of Halbert and had told him to finish up what work he had to do and then leave the farm. McCaskell had gone off to complete his daily tasks and had returned in the afternoon to find his wife and baby dead and Halbert hanging from the front porch in an apparent suicide.

The police began an investigation and slowly it looked like things just didn't add up.

During the autopsy it was found that Halbert was already in an advanced stage of rigor mortis but that McCaskell's wife and baby were not. Very strange as Halbert was supposed to have died AFTER them.

It was also noted that the rope mark around Halbert's neck formed a complete circle, as if he had been strangled rather than hung.

When the police examined the rope, they found that if Halbert had had it around his neck he could have stood on the veranda with six inches of slack rope to spare. Lastly they also found that the box he was supposed to have stood on and kicked away was too heavy to have been moved in such a manner.

Another neighbour stated that he had visited McCaskell's farm the afternoon of the murders and

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found Halbert lying dead on the porch but there was no sign of a rope around his neck.

McCaskell was kept under watch by the police in the local hotel but as time progressed he became more and more agitated.

Finally he made a break for it and took off in a car towards his farm. The police gave chase but couldn't keep up and McCaskell reached the farm first. Abandoning his car McCaskell ran away on foot behind a hay stack and as the police gave chase again there was a violent explosion from the far side of the stack.

McCaskell had apparently hidden a stick of TNT in the hay and now that the game was up, he put it in his mouth and lit the fuse!

A fitting end for an evil man. The motive? Just money. McCaskell had taken out a two thousand pound life insurance policy on his wife two months earlier.

The Coroner recorded that McCaskell committed the murders while he was insane but the cold calculated way he set Halbert up, strangled him and then waited several more hours before brutally slaying his own wife and child show that the murders were in fact anything but a spur of the moment act of insanity.

Red Dog

Red Dog, as he came to be known started his life with the name 'Tally Ho' which in typical Australian style was quickly shortened to just Tally.

He started out in Paraburdoo and was born sometime in 1971. The family who originally owned him moved to Dampier and it was here the the legend of Red Dog really started.

Until reaching Dampier Red Dog was just another Kelpie, Cattle Dog cross. He showed signs of his wanderlust early in life but once he reached Dampier his travels really started to reach epic proportions.

Red Dog took to travelling on the local buses. He made friends with one of the local bus drivers but was said to have become very distraught when the driver was later killed in a vehicle accident. Some say the Red Dog spent the rest of his days looking for his lost friend.

How many of Red Dogs antics are folk lore and how many actually happened we will probably never know but it is said that he would board a vehicle and refuse to get off until it took him exactly where he wanted to go.

His eating habits were less than savory causing him to break smelly wind regularly. In the enclosed confines of various vehicles this must have been a testing time for the other occupants.

Red haired people in Australia are often called 'Blue' and so it was that Red Dog also picked up the nickname 'Blue'. It was at Dampier Salt that he got this name and it was this location that he chose to make his home base.

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Red Dog was adopted by the workforce at Dampier Salt and they saw to it he was correctly registered with the local council and they tended his wounds after his numerous fights and scrapes.

Not everyone was a fan of Red Dog and on one occasion he was found with two bullet wounds in a back leg. He was taken all the way to Port Hedland for treatment and the trip eventually cost quite a sizeable sum.

His travels are said to have taken him as far afield as Perth and Sandfire but in 1979 his journey came to an end when he picked up a poison bait and eventually had to be humanely put to sleep.

A memorial was erected to the memory of Red Dog and his statue still stands today on a hill overlooking the town.



Red Dog not only has the memorial in Dampier to remind us of his travels but in 2011 the movie 'Red Dog' was released to celebrate one of the Pilbara's most memorable and unique characters.

Baby boom

The railway from Wiluna to Mullewa was famous for its lack of promptness. One story concerns a lady and a conductor:

Lady: 'When will we arrive? I must get to Wiluna as soon as possible, I'm pregnant.'

Conductor: 'Madam I am surprised you boarded the train in that condition.'

Lady: "When I boarded the train I wasn't in this condition!"

Perhaps this is just folklore but word has it that a camel train once beat the steam train on a journey between the two towns.

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